

This Can Be a Tipping Point For Equality, If We Push

Written by Mike Honda
Sunday, 24 July 2011 19:11

We have reached a tipping point in our fight for equality in America. Forty-two years after the Stonewall riots - a defining moment in the beginning of America's gay rights movement - New York's legalization of same-sex marriage and California's mandate to teach lesbian, bi-sexual, gay, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) history in grade schools, bring this country closer to a more equal society.

In my decade in Congress, the gay community and its allies have fought numerous battles and this double victory shows we have not fought in vain. Both California and New York, with their own rich history of LGBTQ activism, have taken courageous steps towards equality. I commend Governors Jerry Brown and Andrew Cuomo for answering the calls of their constituents. I am also proud of the progress made in Congress including the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and movement towards the Defense of Marriage Act repeal. The fact that the Pentagon announced this week that the U.S. military is prepared to accept openly gay and lesbian service members, and doing so will not harm military readiness, is great news. Yet, I know this is not enough.

Discrimination in any realm is still inequality. Now more than ever, it is imperative to remind each other, and our elected officials, that until we all have equal rights – be it the right to marry or earn equal wages – liberty and justice has not yet been granted. Consider California.

California's groundbreaking legislation – S.B. 48, the California FAIR Education Act (also known as the LGBT History Bill) – requires all public schools to teach significant eras and historical movements, such as the previously omitted topics of the gay rights movement and disabilities education. California has laid out a framework for dialogue for the entire country.

This dialogue among young people and educators hopes to break the misconceptions and stigma in our society regarding the gay community, and slowly lead to an increased social awareness among future generations.

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Consider New York. Even as New York became the sixth and largest state to grant same-sex marriage licenses, thousands of gay couples remain in immigration limbo throughout the country, not able to sponsor their partners for residency or prevent deportation. In fact, one of my constituents, Judy Rickard, is being torn apart from her partner because of unfair immigration laws. Judy and others face a distinctly different, and unequal, reality compared with heterosexual couples. We must not forget that these communities continue to struggle, often silently, for their rights. We must continue to advocate for equal rights within the gay community and to increase the visibility and profile of all underrepresented communities – including the elimination of discrimination in immigration law against same-sex, permanent partners and their families who are seeking to reunite. It is time to reunite the tens of thousands of lives and livelihoods put on hold due to our current discriminatory immigration law. We must also support non-discrimination laws such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, lifting the HIV Entry Ban on immigrants, and guaranteeing LGBTQ families the right to visit and make medical decisions for their partners.

These are only a few pieces of legislative accomplishments that we hope to achieve, but we need your help. We are steadily making progress as we work to repeal legislation such as California's Proposition 8 and the Defense for Marriage Act. As long as we continue to fight on all fronts, change will follow.